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CULTURAL INTRODUCTION TO RENAISSANCE ROME

Ingrid D. Rowland

Modern Rome strikes its visitors as a truly Eternal City, its imposing ancient ruins forever choked in a seething tide of buses, cars, and motor scooters, the Michelangelo-designed trapezoid of its civic center jostling the gleaming marble pile of the late nineteenth-century monument to King Victor Emmanuel II. At the summit of this "Altar of the Fatherland" brazen winged victories flog their four-horse chariots high above the tourist throngs of Piazza Venezia; living streams of people, buses, and cars flow peaceably past the fifteenth-century balcony from which Mussolini once harangued the crowds. In the 1340s, Cola di Rienzo (1313–54) harangued their forebears from the slopes of the Capitoline Hill, thinking back to Romulus. Nothing, not one layer, seems to have been omitted from the sediments of Roman history; they seem to have been laid down with the same geological patience and the same stone fixity as the striations in an ancient rock. And yet this Roman pageant is anything but natural; great cities, if anything, are as likely to die as to persist: Climates change, beliefs change, people change, and complex systems break down. The Rome we see is one continuing act of will, the will to make a human city last an eternity, and for now, despite what must be an equally eternal human expectation of doomsday, Rome's effort to endure has succeeded. In many respects, however, Rome's eternity was a deliberate invention of the Renaissance papacy, a figment whose brilliant spark was almost extinguished at birth by its patent absurdity.

For Renaissance Rome owed its existence to nothing more than an idea, an idea that proved powerful enough to override every law of practicality and transform an impoverished backwater of a medieval city into a modern European capital within the space of two centuries. The idea was so simple that it could be stated in three words: *Roma caput mundi,* "Rome, head of the world," a line first penned by the poet Lucan for the emperor Nero.[1] To anyone who looked over Rome's Seven Hills thirteen centuries later, like the poet Francesco Petrarca – Petrarch (1304–74) – that phrase, a relic of ancient Roman pride of place, could only serve as an ironic reminder of human evanescence; the worldwide empire of which Rome had once formed the head had begun to fall to pieces nearly a thousand years before. Now the great capital lay in ruins, largely deserted within the eleven-mile perimeter of ancient city walls that had failed, in the end, to keep away the barbarian hordes. As Petrarch would write in 1367 or 1368:

> Although when I first . . . went to Rome, almost nothing was left of that old Rome but an outline or an image, and only the ruins bore witness to its bygone greatness, nonetheless, among those ashes there were still some noble sparks; but now the ash is long extinguished and grown cold.[2]

But Petrarch was wrong about those ashes. By his own efforts, over many years of inspired writing and impassioned conversation, he had succeeded in fanning their scattered sparks into a flame that burned

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throughout southern Europe, in Naples, Florence, and France as well as Rome. Within decades, the idea of *Roma caput mundi* had become an article of faith to galvanize popes, churchmen, pilgrims, and a growing class of people inspired by Petrarch's example who devoted all their strength of mind, body, and imagination to rekindling those cold Roman ashes, using them to create something gloriously new. These scholar-creators called their enterprise the *studia humanitatis,* the study of humanity, and we call them what they called themselves: humanists.

The crucial element in Rome's transformation from Petrarch's bleak vision of ruin to the fifteenth century's urgent mission of reconstruction was the papacy. In Petrarch's day, the popes had removed from Rome to Avignon, drawn there by the urgings of the French king and powerful French cardinals. There Petrarch's Florentine father found work in the Curia, as would Petrarch himself, but the son, at least, believed that their relocation was profoundly wrong when the history of the early Church had been traced on Roman stones. Following that persistent Christian habit of identifying the Church with Israel, he called the papal sojourn in Avignon the "Babylonian Captivity" and the city itself, which he cordially hated, "Babylon."

He was not alone in this conviction. From Siena, the Dominican mystic Caterina Benincasa launched the same challenge through her faithful scribe Raymond of Capua, her authority fortified by visions and visitations from Christ Himself. And by 1425, the controversy took a decisive turn when the sacred college elected a Roman nobleman, Oddone Colonna, as Pope Martin V. A relative of Stefano Colonna, the man whom Petrarch had identified in 1368 as the "sole Phoenix" rising from Rome's ashes, Pope Martin acted immediately to ensure that Rome's grandeur became an active project rather than a smoldering memory. He began to move the Curia back, as he saw it, home, recognizing the economic power that the papacy brought with it – money had drawn the popes to Avignon in the first place – and immediately began to exploit the economic advantages that Rome could offer over the French Babylon. The process would not be entirely completed during his reign, nor in that of his successor, Eugenius IV, who spent much of his own reign in Florence; but in retrospect it is clear that with Pope Martin's election the idea that Rome was the rightful home for the papacy took definitive form.

For the city itself, housing the Curia meant business, creating employment for the people who provided the Church hierarchy with a bewildering variety of services, from the humanists who drafted the documents of the papal bureaucracy in suitably elegant Latin to the prostitutes who exploited the gap between the priestly vow of celibacy and the stirrings of the flesh. For the Curia, in turn, Rome provided a constant stream of pilgrims, drawn to the ancient sites where saints had performed miracles or died in the faith. Many of these faithful visitors were desperately poor, but many were not. They came, they worshiped, and they spent, especially in Jubilee years, when the Church granted them more generous terms than usual for the remission of their sins. Rome has never again lost track of the association between curial revenues and pilgrim revenues. Through the actions of Martin V, patriotic Roman pope, the idea of Rome as head of the Church gained a gloriously timeless perspective with its fifteenth-century reinvention: This was the moment that gave life to the idea of Rome as Eternal City, *caput mundi* not for a season but for all time. Thus the Babylonian Captivity of this Christian Israel ended after only seventy years, with the establishment of its New Jerusalem along the Tiber.

Physically, the Rome that Pope Martin found upon his return from Avignon was still the same medieval settlement that Petrarch had seen decades before, its houses and churches nestled among the ruins, the low-lying terrain where most people lived fully exposed to the Tiber's periodic floods. Turf battles still raged among the local barons, headed by Pope Martin's own Colonna clan and the Orsini, their inveterate rivals. The barons' incessant wranglings, and their tendency to impose their own family members as popes, had driven the cardinals to sleek, boring Avignon in the first place.

It probably took a Colonna pope, a baron in his own right, to subdue old Rome enough to make room for a vision of new Rome. And what gave that new Rome its impetus was the band of humanists serving the Curia as its clerical staff. Petrarch had been such a curial employee himself until he was able

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to live on his reputation as a writer. His friends, his curial colleagues, and his reading public absorbed his outlook as they devoured his copious, beautiful writings, almost all of these suffused with a deep melancholic longing for things he could never have: the woman he loved and who died before he could tell her so, the world of antiquity. "I would rather have been born in any time but my own," he lamented, and he corresponded not only with his living friends but also with the long-dead people he would have liked to know: To Cicero he addressed a letter "from the upper world, on the right bank of the River Adige, in the city of Verona, on June 16, in the year from the birth of that God whom you never knew 1345," saying:

> I am sorry about your fate, my friend, and I am ashamed for you and pity your errors, for along with Brutus himself "I set no store by the arts in which I know you were so well versed." What use is it to teach others, what benefit is there in speaking about virtue in fine words if in the meantime you never listen to your own advice?

By his prodigious efforts to soothe his own insatiable longings, Petrarch set the example for a whole way of life: He collected manuscripts of the ancient authors to whom he wrote as if death itself could never really keep them apart. He read the old books with painstaking care in order to discern each word his authors had truly written, not what careless or clueless scribes might have copied down in its place. He sensed the vast difference between the style of ancient Latin and his own, and began to mold his own language on theirs. But Petrarch was not simply a man obsessed by nostalgia. He also wrote some of the most innovative works of his era – composing in his own Tuscan vernacular, for example, perfecting the vernacular sonnets that heralded what contemporaries called the *dolce stil novo,* the "sweet new style." The past gave him a set of standards by which to measure the creations of the present, and because he applied those standards mercilessly to his own work, the results were often surpassingly beautiful.

The "sweet new style" took its first powerful hold in Florence, because that city's wealth ensured active encouragement of the arts, its flourishing trade connections fostered an appetite for new ideas, and its republican form of government lent particular relevance to the literary legacy of the ancient Roman republic, especially the writings of versatile, eloquent Cicero. In Florence, the changes wrought by Petrarch on writing, Giotto on art, and Brunelleschi on architecture all came about within a proud, long-established merchant tradition that reached back at least to the eleventh century. Brunelleschi's Ospedale degli Innocenti, whose harmoniously proportioned facade forever changed his countrymen's taste in architecture in 1419, nonetheless reflected the wishes of a medieval guild, the Arte della Seta (Silkmakers), by lending new rigor to the design of a lovely medieval form of covered porch. When in 1427 the statutes of the Florentine commune adopted a new rhetorical style based on conscious emulation of ancient Latin, the change only seemed to confirm what the substance of those statutes had already proven long before: Ancient Roman authors were still worth reading on the matter of governing merchant republics. As medieval Florence spread beyond the gridded street plan of the Roman colony it had once been, it grew into an important commercial city, served from the sea by the River Arno and from the north by the great pilgrimage route, the Via Francigena. Centrally located in Italy, just as Italy was centrally located in the Mediterranean, the city made its living by the ingenuity of its clever middlemen and their industrious wives. Except for a brief hiatus after the Black Death of 1348, the story of Florence was one of continuous expansion, beyond its old walls, its old mores, and its old ways of coexisting with the countryside. As a result, for all its evocations of classical antiquity, the Florentine Renaissance was always more fundamentally an expression of the expansive present.

Rome lagged behind until the mid-fifteenth century, presenting what most visitors saw with Petrarch as a specter of devastation. Invariably, they described the toppled buildings, the broken statues, and the miserable population who made their homes in the imperial ruins at the whim of feudal barons. The huge basilicas of Christianity, themselves relics of late Roman antiquity, crumbled in squalor as vendors hawked souvenirs and straw pallets on which poor pilgrims could bed down within the brick and mar-

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ble porticoes. When a miraculous crucifix, speaking, told Francis of Assisi to "rebuild my Church," the medieval saint took the instruction literally, as an order to shore up the tottering basilica of Saint John Lateran, the huge, decaying mother church of the Christian world (see Fig. 11). In effect, it took the voice of God to suggest that repairing such desolation might even be conceivable.

The residents of Renaissance Rome would also require a stronger propulsive force than merchant optimism to make them look upon the city's ruins as anything other than a standing rebuke to human pride. Like Saint Francis before them, these rebuilders believed that their work of restoration answered the call of God. The urgent image of rebirth that underpins the very idea of the Renaissance (not to mention the term itself) was forged, not in Florence, but in Rome – and when that rebirth was conceived, its audacity was staggering. In the minds of those brave reconstructionists of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, just as God's sovereign plan for human salvation had been played out over the Roman cityscape, from the landing of Aeneas to the martyrdom of Saint Peter, to the conversion of Constantine, so, too, the scattered individual pieces of that cityscape exerted their own magical powers. Churches rose on the very spots where early Christians had borne witness to their faith (or at least were believed to have done so): the place where Saint Peter had been cast into prison (as had the North African king Jugurtha before him), where he had dropped a bandage dressing the wounds from his fetters, where an apparition of Jesus had turned him back on the Appian Way to face crucifixion by order of Emperor Nero, the three fountains that sprang up when Saint Paul's freshly severed head bounced three times before coming to rest, the sumptuous palaces that rich Roman matrons offered for meetings with the likes of Saint Jerome. Renaissance Romans all believed (as modern scholars do not) that Christian martyrs had been thrown to the lions in the Colosseum; they also believed (and modern scholars agree) that Saint Peter's Basilica had risen on the foundations of Nero's Circus. At Santa Maria sopra Minerva, the Virgin Mary as *sedes sapientiae,* throne of wisdom, replaced a temple to the Etrusco-Roman goddess of wisdom; at Santa Maria Maggiore, an old shrine to the birth goddess Juno Lucina had been supplanted by a chapel to the Nativity with relics of the original manger of Bethlehem.

But the magical powers of ancient Rome extended beyond the sacred places of Christian tradition. Every fragment of the city's past had its story to tell, its spell to enchant. To the humanists and their contemporaries, the columns and statues strewn among the ruins seemed to encode a secret lore of perfect proportion, known to the ancients and lost in later eras, a perfection based on harmony with the human body. The Roman architectural writer Vitruvius taught his readers to see columns as no less essentially human images than statues, evocative representations of ideal human form, just as faithful Christians saw Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary as ideal images of the human spirit; indeed, the Lateran palace boasted the very column against which Christ had been flagellated; it was known as the *mensura Christi*, the "measure of Christ," and was eventually supplied with a tall base to make its diminutive height more lordly. If Christian inscriptions in the catacombs testified to the first workings of the Messiah in the world, the ancient Latin and Greek texts with their stately lettering expressed their own version of divine order, providing their own graceful words to acknowledge death, life, yearning, and immortality. The humanists, theologians, and artists who aspired to remake Rome as a glorious world capital became careful investigators of divine order in all its forms; for them, the ruins of the Eternal City seemed to reveal traces of God's plan just as clearly as they laid bare the details of ancient construction methods. But in fact the ruins never revealed enough. Rather, in their tantalizing incompleteness, the monuments of Rome afforded a far greater play for imagination than the sight of any real city, spawning ideas of a scope and daring that no complete city could ever have inspired with quite the same success.

Yet, like the Roman Empire, the Roman Renaissance, for all its rootedness in definite physical place, also forced its way outward into the larger world. Such quintessentially Florentine figures as Filippo Brunelleschi and Donatello could have acquired certain aspects of their own tireless dedication and their massive ambition only from their visits to Rome: It was the example of the Pantheon that afforded Brunelleschi the courage to imagine a dome

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for Florence cathedral, and where but in a city of broken gods could Donatello have come to believe that his statues, too, might speak?

In the end, however, what fueled the actual creation of Renaissance Rome, like the development of Florence before it and of Germany thereafter, was money. The city began to gain cultural ascendancy only when it had reached a degree of economic stability in the mid-fifteenth century; by then, the return of the papacy to Rome seemed assured, once again providing the city's prime source of employment as well as outside income. Furthermore, precisely because of the city's unique political structure, history, and physical presence, its culture also took on its own distinctive characteristics. In the first place, the papacy, with its theocratic monarchy, deliberately drew its inspiration from the ideals, imagery, and democratic fictions of the ancient Roman Empire. The college of cardinals was known as the "sacred Senate," and like the Senate under the Roman emperors, it served a monarch – but a monarch elected from among its number, in a last vestige of the Roman Senate's republican origins.

In fact, when republican ideals took hold in Rome, as they did on occasion, the result, until Mazzini and Garibaldi in 1849 and the Italian Republic in 1870, was almost invariably chaos. In the Renaissance, members of the local aristocracy, chronically resentful of papal power, were especially susceptible to the lure of republican ideas. A contemporary of Petrarch, Cola di Rienzo, was a Roman notary who declared himself Tribune of the People in 1347 in defiance of the baronial Roman city council still known as the Roman Senate. He kept sway over the city for a few months with his fiery oratory – until his own greed, fed by exorbitant taxes, drove his supporters to force him into exile; in 1352 he returned as papal senator from Avignon, and once again his excesses, and the taxes he levied to support them, brought him to grief. This time his adversaries no longer settled for exile – they stabbed Cola to death in 1354 as if he were a second Julius Caesar, tribune turned dictator.

The Roman aristocrat Stefano Porcari mounted a conspiracy in 1453 to assassinate none other than the enlightened Pope Nicholas V on the Feast of the Epiphany and to declare a free lay republic. The failure of the conspiracy was duly celebrated in a Latin epic, *Porcaria,* penned for Pope Nicholas by a pseudonymous "Horatius Romanus"; the title surely exploited its similarity with *porcheria* ("piggery"), the pungent vernacular expression for "a mess."

In 1468, Pope Paul II rounded up and imprisoned a group of curial bureaucrats and university professors with the excuse that their immersion in pagan, republican literature had induced them to plot his assassination; along with the future Vatican librarian Bartolomeo Platina, the accused included the charismatic young professor of rhetoric at the University of Rome, Giulio Pomponio Leto (1428–97), who escaped to Venice (and incurred another charge, of sodomy). In this case the charges of republican agitation were figments of the pope's own paranoia; both Platina and Leto drew happy profit from papal Rome as it was evolving in the later fifteenth century; indeed, they had a considerable voice in shaping the direction of the city's culture.

In the first years of the sixteenth century, the most outspoken republican, ironically, was Pompeo Colonna, scion of the great feudal family that produced both Petrarch's friend Stefano Colonna and Pope Martin V. Pompeo, a future cardinal, eventually aspired to the papacy himself, but in the meantime he was willing to play the republican firebrand and serve as a captain of mercenary soldiers. In 1511, when rumor had it that the ailing Pope Julius II had lapsed into a coma, Colonna mounted the Capitoline Hill, like Cola di Rienzo before him, to preach revolution – and to realize, in midoration, that the volatile old pope, resurrected from his sickbed, was heading toward the Capitol with flailing cane in hand.

As these stories of papal imperium and republican revolution prove repeatedly, the brooding presence of the ancient ruins gave Renaissance Rome's sense of its distant past an urgent physical immediacy. The Capitoline Hill, where ancient Roman generals had led their triumphal processions up to the temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, hosted not only republican revolutions but also papal pageants, the chambers of the city council (that is, the Roman Senate), and the modern world's first public museum, opened by Pope Sixtus IV in 1471. Humanists met beneath the vaults of the Colosseum or the arches of ancient aqueducts to recite Roman poetry and compose new works of their own, surrounded amid the ruins by

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herdsmen pasturing their flocks, lovers trysting, thugs lurking, artists sketching, everyone stopping for a picnic. The very ground upon which the city stood was a strange landscape of volcanic bedrock, stratified river silt from the unruly Tiber's incessant floods, and the remains of ancient structures, some as intact as the Pantheon, some ground to dust, most of them disintegrating gracefully as they played host to plants, birds, and animals of every kind. There was no consistency to the way in which Rome's residents reacted to these surroundings: The ancient statues that Roman lime burners fed into their kilns were the same ones that artists copied and rich patrons collected; familiarity bred both contempt and veneration. The architects of Renaissance Rome could hardly resist emulating the stately proportions of ancient buildings; through painstaking study, they eventually came to understand, and then to apply, the ancient Romans' subtle system of aesthetic refinements, deployed with the same inspired freedom as the ancients, and governed by the same rigor. But they also looted the fallen portions of the Colosseum to erect the walls of palazzi whose forms were themselves eloquent reworkings of the Colosseum's facade: The taste for relics extended beyond the bodies of Christian saints to the remnants of pagan antiquity.

The sheer complexity of Renaissance Rome's position between ancient past and imaginative present meant that the project of its revival fostered an unusual degree of collaboration: between churchmen and scholars, scholars and artists, artists and entrepreneurs. If a Leone Battista Alberti (1404–72) could read ancient texts, write vernacular bestsellers, and design cathedrals while employed to draft documents for the papal bureaucracy, if a Donato Bramante could recite Dante, improvise songs on the lute, and penetrate the secrets of classical aesthetics while practicing as painter and architect, most people were not so versatile – their creative strength depended upon the strength of their friendships. Even the many-talented Raphael, painter, architect, and designer on an international scale, sharpened his wits by working together with the urbane writer Baldassare Castiglione, the eccentric pedant Marco Fabio Calvo, and the scholar-businessman Angelo Colocci.

By comparison with Florence, where the Medici dictated intellectual and artistic fashion for generations, or Naples, with its Spanish-centered court, or even Venice, with its broad-based but carefully regimented civic life, the cultural life of Rome throve in a wide variety of places: in the palazzi of cardinals, businessmen, ambassadors, and papal bureaucrats as well as the Apostolic Palace. For if the popes commanded both spiritual and temporal power during their reigns, the reigns themselves were often quite short – popes, like Venetian doges, were usually elected as old men. The prelates, artists, bankers, and courtiers who depended on the papacy for their livelihood learned to adapt quickly to changing regimes; at the same time, they maintained a certain degree of diffuse independence from the city's one dominant figure by forming their own associations: learned academies, religious confraternities, gatherings of friends. Their society was conspicuously male because the Church itself was governed by a caste of celibate priests.

As the fifteenth century progressed into the sixteenth, Rome's economic standing began to improve dramatically as individual popes invested huge sums of money in tangible improvements for the city. Paul II may have treated the humanists harshly, but his own Palazzo Venezia and its associated church of San Marco (see Figs. 44, 45) contributed grandly to the cityscape; another relatively inactive pope, Innocent VIII, invited artists like Pinturicchio and the great Andrea Mantegna to decorate his Villa Belvedere at the Vatican (see Fig. 63) – no one invested with Julius Caesar's resonant title of Pontifex Maximus could resist contributing his own stratum to Rome's layers of history. The cardinals, in turn, many of them aiming for Saint Peter's throne themselves, competed with the pope and with one another to further the great collective project of Rome's renewal. By the end of the sixteenth century, construction had become the city's chief industry, with an army of architects, painters, sculptors, plasterers, masons, stonecutters, woodworkers, blacksmiths, and ropemakers eagerly at work to make the glories of Christian Rome rival those of its pagan predecessor, if not to surpass them altogether.

Patrons and artists worked in tandem to produce this new Christian capital, each helping to hammer out new standards of style and aesthetics. These standards applied to every aspect of life – language, art,

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music, building, behavior – but the humanists and their literary culture always wielded special authority in a society based on a religion that prized its sacred Scriptures. And yet, although the essential purpose of the humanists on the curial staff was to proclaim the Gospels, they actually drafted letters, bulls, and encyclicals in a Latin that aspired to the elegance of Cicero and the poetry of Virgil; their colleagues who worked as teachers, university professors, or members of aristocratic households exacted similar aesthetic standards of the lay community. Most humanists, like Petrarch and his friends, the first of their number, were compelled to work in order to live well – just as Cicero had needed to make his own way as a "new man" in ancient Rome. If their evocation of the ancient Romans had begun as a style, it quickly became an educational curriculum, one that looked especially attractive when compared with the arid professional Latin of law and theology. Furthermore, the *studia humanitatis* (like the Church itself) offered a way for talented men of modest means to improve their social station at a time when social station, because of Italy's pivotal position in international commerce, had become increasingly fluid. Some of Rome's most influential figures used their education as humanists to overcome ambiguous social status: Some were illegitimate children of wealthy fathers, who worked for hire because they were legally denied any claim to an inheritance. Leone Battista Alberti, writer, architect, and sometime curial humanist, was the illegitimate son of a Florentine banker. The University of Rome's great professor of rhetoric, Pomponio Leto, had been born out of wedlock to a Calabrian prince. Some humanists had escaped from tiny villages, some from the political violence – or the simple boredom – of small city-states. Others, like the Venetian aristocrat Pietro Bembo, came to Rome because they had failed to make their fortune anywhere else. In this city of celibate men, many of its most talented women were poor girls whose most promising choice of profession was a form of high-class prostitution that earned them the title *cortigiana onesta* – a courtesan "of good reputation." They based that "good reputation" on the literary and musical talents that distinguished them from their more humble colleagues; the most prudent of these women were also shrewd investors in Roman real estate.

Some humanists managed on an independent income: orator, actor, and Vatican librarian Tommaso Inghirami of Volterra (see Fig. 86) and the genial nobleman Angelo Colocci of Iesi bought curial offices and real estate, playing both markets with something of the same dispassionate skill as their contemporary, the merchant banker Agostino Chigi of Siena. Each of these immigrants from central Italian city-states made fundamental contributions to the cultural life of Renaissance Rome: Inghirami as a performer, Chigi as a private patron on a truly imperial scale, Colocci as a publisher, consultant, host, and the generous possessor of an impressive collection of books that he made liberally available to his friends. Their friend Alessandro Farnese (1468–1549), a landed noble from the papal states, was trained in humane letters at the University of Rome (where he was Inghirami's classmate). He became cardinal when Pope Alexander VI Borgia (1431–1503), took Giulia Farnese, Alessandro's sister, as his mistress, perhaps at the brother's instigation. Ironically, when this worldly prelate was finally elected pope in 1534 as Paul III (see Fig. 127), he would inaugurate the reforming Council of Trent, in which the morals of priests would become a topic of earnest debate. The poet Vittoria Colonna, friend of Michelangelo, came from the same Roman baronial stock that had produced Cardinal Pompeo and Pope Martin V. Yet however varied the background of the humanists might have been, the self-made authors were often the most eager to establish standards for literary style – but then they had a more desperate need to distinguish themselves in order to survive in their often brutal world.

The humanists transformed language by reemphasizing its power as rhetoric, as persuasive speech. They drew on ancient Greek and Roman precedent, for the urban dwellers of the Mediterranean world had refined rhetoric to a highly specialized training tailored to meet the practical needs of law courts and deliberative assemblies. Ancient rhetorical manuals, from Aristotle's *Rhetoric* to Quintilian's *Institutions of Oratory,* not to mention Cicero, agreed that the goal of rhetoric was persuasion pure and simple; success at the law and in statesmanship could be measured by the extent to which the orator convinced judges, juries, senates, assemblies, or motley crowds of his (rarely her) position. Consequently, rhetorical instruction

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focused with ruthless precision on the techniques for presenting a plausible case. A trained voice, effective gestures, and compelling facial expression might help drive home an orator's message, but the most rigorous training involved more intricate tasks: the effective construction of arguments, and the expansion of memory to the point where the best orators could deliver speeches of several hours without a single note.

For both of these activities, argumentation and memory training, the visual arts, especially architecture, provided a natural set of metaphors: Like a building, an argument had to be constructed on a foundation and supplied with a body, and it reached completion only when the last intricate ornament had been set in place. But the affinities between rhetoric and the arts went deeper than this; ancient authors applied an identical theoretical outlook and analytical vocabulary to every kind of human creation. They defined the act of composition, whether of a speech, a building, a song, or a statue, first by genre or type (Greek *genos,* Latin *genus*): An epic poem required a different order of effort than a pastoral eclogue or a curt epigram; a temple required different standards of opulence than a marketplace; a hortatory speech aimed to make its hearers respond by clamoring for action, whereas an epideictic (Greek for "demonstrative") speech was chiefly intended to make them think.

The act of choosing a genre in its turn unlocked a whole sequence of compositional steps, which theorists from Aristotle to Vitruvius usually separated into "ordering" (Greek *taxis,* Latin *ordinatio*) and "placement" (Greek *diathesis,* Latin *dispositio*), that is, setting out the overall lines of the work (statue, speech, song, building) as a whole and then laying down its individual components. Ornament, because it was applied last in sequence and on the most minute scale, represented the ultimate natural outgrowth of this compositional process, and because it was seen as a natural consequence of placement, it was regarded as a succinct expression in miniature of the entire work's genre, ordering, and placement.

In practice, ancient rhetorical writers insisted to a one that this magnificent machine of compositional theory was always to be modified in keeping with individual circumstances; it was the unpredictably improvised expedients and broken rules that actually constituted the essence of artfulness, whether in the case of Cicero departing from a long, sonorous phrase to deliver a swift verbal jab, or Vitruvius bending the floor plan of a house to fit a peculiar site. For the ancient theorists, therefore, the most successful works of creation were never those that followed the rules exactly, and it was this unrelenting tension between the clean orderliness of the rules and the spontaneity of their bending that made the classical vocabulary of creation so enduringly versatile.

As early as Socrates and his generation in the late fifth century B.C., the apparent amorality of rhetorical training had raised questions about how to assess bravura acts of "making the weaker argument appear the stronger." Socrates and Plato urged that it was more imperative to tell the truth than to revel in sophistry, all the while relying on their own mastery of rhetoric to make the point. Christian preachers from Saint Paul in the first century to Saint Augustine in the fourth, Saint Bernardino of Siena and Fra Girolamo Savonarola in the fifteenth, and Saint Carlo Borromeo in the seventeenth, all criticized the amorality of classical rhetoric. The humanists, however, turned the moralists' arguments back on themselves. Claiming that the orderly process of composition as it was described by the ancient authors reflected God's own methods of creation, they defended the ancient authors by hailing classical proportion as divine proportion (this is what the Franciscan friar Luca Pacioli did for the golden section in his book *On the Divine Proportion*), and linking the ancient aesthetic system to the cause of Christian redemption by noting that its emphasis on human scale was wholly appropriate to Jesus Christ's incarnation in human form. To the humanist Paolo Cortesi, writing in 1504, only the beauty and emotional charge of ancient rhetoric paid adequate tribute to the beauty of Christian theology.

In language, music, and art, therefore, the advocates of Rome's rebirth strove to recover the theoretical precision of the ancients' attention to style in their own thinking and the ancients' same clarity of procedure in their actual practice. For guidance in this ambitious enterprise, humanists and artists could look in two directions: to the large body of surviving ancient writing – inscriptions as well as manuscripts

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– and to the ancient monuments. But whereas literary classicism could be practiced wherever books could travel, true understanding of the classical compositional system required patient study of real ancient buildings, and these abounded in Rome as nowhere else. Patient study of ancient Rome, in turn, gave rise to the daring idea that the city's rebirth might be a real physical possibility, houses, churches, theaters, aqueducts, and all.

For the realities of Rome supplied Renaissance artists with more than tangible evidence of ancient craftsmanship – the presence of the monuments, with all their variety of histories and meanings, also gave the new art of Renaissance Rome a missionary purpose. In the city of the popes, from the fifteenth century onward, classical style became the preferred instrument for spreading a gospel that included the institutional Church as a crucial part of its message; in the works of papal orators, artists, architects, and city planners, the old rhetorical goal of convincing the public was ingeniously transmuted into preaching the Gospel – and thereby made moral. Beautiful language and beautiful buildings seemed more likely than any others to convince the world of Christian truth.

Furthermore, the ancient art of memory, which had survived the Middle Ages as a technique of unfailing usefulness for speakers and writers, took on a remarkable physical immediacy for Rome's artists and orators as they transformed the ruined stretches of the city into places for individual and collective reminiscence. Heads wreathed with garlands, wine cups in hand, they re-created the sacred atmosphere and lofty conversation of Plato's *Symposium,* the ribaldry of Petronius, or the evangelical frenzy of the disciples in the upper room on Pentecost, gathering in the garden plots they called *vigne,* "grape arbors" – indeed, no proper *vigna* lacked a flourishing vine to provide shade from the summer's heat and, in the fall, its own modest vintage.

The art of memory depended on more than suggestive ruins, wine, and good company, however; it was one of the ancient world's most exacting skills. Through a method first devised by the ancient Greeks, aspiring speakers in the ancient Greco-Roman world learned to cast the different parts of their speeches as vivid images (*imagines*), placed in sequence (*dispositio* again) within imaginary structured backgrounds (*loci*). The very act of tying words to images already engaged a greater range of the speaker's mind than rote memorization – significantly, babies learn to point and speak at the same time – and hence, however laborious the technique may seem from contemporary descriptions, it worked, and reliably, saving generations of public speakers from embarrassment or disaster.

But beyond training individual memories as an integral part of rhetorical education, the ancient world had also fostered a larger cultural memory through its libraries; among these, the great collections of Alexandria and Pergamon were the most famous. No humanist could have doubted that Rome's renewal called for a library worthy of such a city, and least of all the humanist pope who was the first since the return from Avignon to reign without contending with a rival antipope: Nicholas V, elected in 1447. Nicholas also understood with particular clarity that art, architecture, and city planning could do their own part to advance the image of Rome as the papacy's proper, divinely sanctioned home. Hence he mounted an ambitious program of construction in the city and within the Vatican, and summoned the Dominican painter Fra Angelico from Florence to paint the walls of his private chapel – which the angelic painter did with exquisite competence (see Figs. 28, 29). The pope's own huge collection of some eleven hundred books, meanwhile, provided the first nucleus for an official, public Vatican Library.

From the outset, the idea of a Vatican Library commanded enormous power, both real and suggestive. In an era when books were still copied entirely by hand, they were expensive commodities, but Nicholas planned in addition to house his collection in appropriate splendor, as he declared, "a library of all books both in Latin and Greek that is worthy of the dignity of the Pope and the Apostolic See." For the purpose, he reserved three rooms on the ground floor of a new wing he had added on the north side of the Apostolic Palace: in the center, a Biblioteca Graeca for manuscripts in Greek, and on either side a Biblioteca Latina and a Biblioteca Secreta that belonged exclusively to the papacy. Unfortunately, Nicholas died in 1455, before any space but the Biblioteca Graeca had been decorated; to this day, the room bears his coat of arms and frescoes executed in an antique style with

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vases, garlands, and architectural fantasies, probably by the Florentine painter Andrea del Castagno. By then, the two papal libraries boasted about three thousand books in all.

Like the tomb of Saint Peter beneath the great fourth-century basilica that bore his name, the Vatican Library of Nicholas V stood simultaneously as a memorial to the ancient Rome and as a foundation stone for the city's rebirth, challenging fifteenth-century believers to make Rome a Christian capital with as glittering a physical presence as its imperial predecessor, with the added assurance that the new Rome would also rank as a triumphant work of the spirit. Within each room, the manuscripts seem to have been organized along the new lines favored by humanists: philosophy, law, poetry, and theology, carrying out an explicit mission to reconcile Christian faith with the various fields of ancient and modern knowledge in the belief that they all had been essential in the creation of Rome.

It would take nearly twenty years for another pope to show an equal interest in the Vatican Library; even a humanist like Pius II (1458–63) was more interested in mounting a Crusade against the Turks than in creating a public library. Twenty years after Nicholas's death, however, in 1475, another scholar-pope, Sixtus IV, completed the original plans, commissioning decorations from the Ghirlandaio brothers (Florentines again), adding a permanent staff and permanent endowments. He would append a fourth room to the suite in 1481. In the bull of foundation, *Ad decorem militantis ecclesiae,* Sixtus made it clear, like Nicholas before him, that this growing collection of books was an essential element in any grand plan for the city's spiritual and physical renewal, "for the enhancing of the Church Militant, for the increase of the Catholic faith, and for the convenience and honor of the learned and studious." In a real sense, the library served as the brain of Renaissance Rome, its articulate memory and its nerve center.

Appropriately, the man whom Sixtus picked as librarian – literally, *custos,* "guardian" – was a humanist of exceptional pugnacity: Bartolommeo Sacchi, called "Platina," the Latin name of his native town, Piadena. A big man with a sharp tongue, Platina had first come to public attention in 1464, when, as a curial employee, he agitated for better working conditions by confronting Pope Paul II in person. Paul's haughty reply, "We are the Pope," inspired Platina to respond in scurrilous verse, and it was no surprise that he was among the first humanists to be arrested by Pope Paul in 1468, charged with paganism, sodomy, and plans to assassinate his papal adversary. Neither prison nor torture could bend Platina's resolve, and eventually the pope released the humanists for lack of evidence against them. Besides, he needed their skills to run his administration. When Paul's successor, Sixtus IV, put this brave man in charge of the Vatican Library in 1475, the appointment was a political as well as a scholarly move – and it showed just how militant an institution a Renaissance library could be.

When this same pope commissioned construction of (and gave his name to) the Sistine Chapel, he personally formulated the program of its decoration. The resources of the Vatican Library clearly stand behind his choice of themes for the chapel's walls, frescoed by a team of the era's most illustrious artists in the first frantic months of 1482, an extended parallel between the lives of Moses and Jesus Christ that suggests in none-too-subtle terms that Rome is the New Jerusalem of the New Promised Land, with Saint Peter's Basilica as the New Temple (see Plate VI and Figs. 60, 61). If the chapel thus testified in public to the pope's own part in the mission of the universal Church, the Vatican Library's manuscripts told the same story on a more intimate scale, in the illuminations that Sixtus commissioned to adorn the rich manuscripts with which he stocked the library's cabinets.

The Vatican Library of Nicholas V was entirely composed of manuscripts; although movable type had been invented by the time of Sixtus and printers had already set up shop in Rome and its environs, manuscripts still represented the most expensive books and the ones that were regarded as most valuable. Sixtus made a special contribution to the library by ordering that Greek authors, like the Egyptian Jewish Neoplatonist Philo of Alexandria, be translated from Greek to Latin, so that their works would be available to a greater number of readers; in this sense, too, the library truly lived up to its designation as an apostolic institution, an explicit instrument of Christian mission. Platina contributed to the library as its administrator, but also as the author of a massive series of *Lives*

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